

10-30-2014

How can we stop more attacks?

Erika Simpson

Political Science, simpson@uwo.ca

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/politicalsciencepub>



Part of the [Political Science Commons](#)

Citation of this paper:

Simpson, Erika, "How can we stop more attacks?" (2014). *Political Science Publications*. 54.
<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/politicalsciencepub/54>

How can we stop more attacks?



Embassy Photo: Chris Plecash

Parliament Hill is cordoned off by police tape after last week's shooting.

Erika Simpson

Published: Thursday, 10/30/2014 11:41 pm EDT

Last Updated: Thursday, 10/30/2014 11:50 pm EDT

The shooter killed in Parliament's Centre Block was a Canadian-born fanatic. Foreign-based operatives may have inspired him, but police have said he acted alone.

Lone-wolf Martin Couture-Rouleau of Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Que. also killed a soldier outside Montreal last week. He seemed depressed, similar to Justin Bourque, who shot and killed three police officers in Moncton, NB earlier this year.

The idea that Canadians "lost their innocence" needs to be tempered by the recollection that lone-wolf psychotics have threatened Canada's Parliament and legislatures before. Corporal Denis Lortie went on a rampage in the Quebec legislature in 1984 killing two legislature employees and another person. In 1988 another man was shot in the Alberta legislature after he opened fire. Mentally unstable, acting alone, their actions may be related to their unhinged minds, not ordered by terrorist cells based in Iraq and Syria.

Terrorists that work in small cells differ from lone wolves. They don't have an established demographic profile so they may be foreign-born and raised, or homegrown. They may be young males, like the two London, Ont. boys who bombed a gas plant in Algeria in a coordinated attack, or they may be female suicide bombers, like the Chechen Black Widows traumatized by seeing their husbands and sons tortured and killed in the Caucasus. They may be highly educated engineers, like Osama bin Laden, or minors with less than a high-school education, like some members of the Toronto 18. They may be from poverty-stricken or middle-class backgrounds, or wealthy and rich. Their average age tends to be in their early 20s, but they may be younger or much older. Mostly single, they may be married and have families.

These days, one common denominator seems to be a misplaced inclination to see themselves acting on the Prophet Mohammed's behalf. But on behalf of Quebec separatism, terrorists with extremist mindsets kidnapped and killed a Quebec cabinet minister during the 1970 October Crisis.

Extremists and fundamentalists appear throughout history and exploit different religious and ideological belief systems to justify their reprehensible inclinations and violent behaviour.

Muslims do not become terrorists because they are Muslims, Quebec separatists don't become murderers because they are separatists, Buddhists don't self-immolate because they are Buddhists, and Christians don't martyr themselves because they are Christians.

What comes next

Definitely the Canadian Security Intelligence Service and Communications Security Establishment Canada need to monitor even more closely the telecommunications of all types of suspicious individuals. Adherents of radical groups bent on using violence tend to recruit online as well as in person, and then train their cult members and suicidal adherents at home in North America or overseas.

Should we therefore check everyone's emails and travel plans, censor the Internet and monitor young people's Facebook accounts and passports, so as to determine whether they are thinking of joining radical terrorist groups?

There is a big difference between intelligence-gathering and evidence-gathering. Intelligence-gathering about people who appear inclined to violent fanaticism is less expensive and less difficult to obtain than evidence-gathering that must stand up in court.

We also need to advocate for more ways to help prevent teenage and young-adult suicide. We can alert medical counsellors and police authorities if we think our sons and daughters feel alienated and alone. We can try to make sure they are not attracted to radical groups bent on instigating violence. But as in the case of the middle-aged psychiatrist who committed the 2009 Fort Hood shooting in the name of Islam, it can be difficult to predict if and when somebody is likely to succumb to a terrorist ideology.

What can be done, then, to combat lone wolves as well as foreign-based terrorist cells?

Hard- and soft-power techniques include strengthening intelligence- and evidence-gathering, at the same time as ending the transmission of horrifying images through the Internet—images that inspire alienated individuals.

We can support development of new technology, like unmanned aerial vehicles made in Waterloo, Ont., that can disrupt or destroy terrorist organizations. We could televise the delivery of more humanitarian aid that helps prevent new cycles of poverty that can trigger retaliatory terrorism. We could substantially increase security at our borders, and become more resigned to a Fortress-America mentality. And we could work harder to promote fairer ways to reduce racial and religious profiling that violates human rights.

Moderate Muslims also need more help to oppose the crusading discourse of radical Islamists, particularly those who preach non-negotiable goals with no middle ground. Any overly doctrinal understanding of friends-versus-foes can lead all types of fundamentalists to portray moderate voices as part of some sort of 'crusading imperialism' that must be violently opposed.

Horrifying pictures of Palestinian children killed in the Gaza Strip this year remain fresh in everyone's memory, along with images of Syrians killed by chemical weapons. Terrifying images from Bosnia, Chechnya and Eritrea are soon substituted with images of torture and mayhem in Guantanamo Bay, Iraq, Kashmir, Mumbai and Syria. Alienated people, especially those with suspected suicidal tendencies, need to be better prevented from resorting to using armed violence in all these global struggles.

Yet non-violent techniques are hardly taught in our elementary and high schools, except in terms of the discourse on how to oppose bullies. Moreover, newfangled sub-disciplines, like peace-and-conflict studies and international conflict management are hardly available at Canadian colleges and universities.

By encouraging everyone to take stronger stands in their communities, churches, mosques and schools against extremism, we should be better equipped to fight all sorts of values and practices that incite indiscriminate “us-versus-them” killing.

Associate professor Erika Simpson teaches about international security, terrorism and global violence in the department of political science at Western University. She is the author of the book NATO and the Bomb, and many other articles and book chapters.

editor@embassynews.ca